Post-Mac-Talla Gaelic periodicals in Nova Scotia

POST-*MAC-TALLA* GAELIC PERIOCICALS IN NOVA SCOTIA: AN ASSESSMENT

Prof. Robert Dunbar
Celtic and Scottish Studies
The University of Edinburgh

Gaelic periodicals began appearing in Scotland with some frequency from 1829 onwards. Generally, they were the product of a single editor-publisher who also often contributed a significant amount of the copy. All such periodicals tended to be relatively short-lived: subscribers and advertisers were generally not numerous, financial resources to support the venture were scarce, and the burdens on the editor-publisher were great.[1] After an initial period of publishing activity, from 1829 to about 1850, there was an hiatus, with Gaelic periodicals appearing again only in the 1870s.[2] *Mac-Talla*, which was published in Sydney, Cape Breton by Jonathan G. MacKinnon, suffered from many of the same handicaps as Scottish-based periodicals. However, it was exceptional in certain respects. The first was its longevity: it ran for about 12 years, between 1892 and 1904, a much longer period than virtually all other similar ventures. The second was the frequency with which it appeared: it came out weekly and, in its last years, biweekly. Third, although it was, like most other Gaelic periodicals, a cultural and literary journal, it did carry a good deal of local, regional, national, and international news, and it also contained comment on current affairs. It could therefore lay claim to being a newspaper as well as a periodical; indeed, it was the only Gaelic newspaper which has ever existed for any extended period.

Mac-Talla was not the first Gaelic periodical published in what is now Canada. In 1840, a monthly called *Cuairtear nan Coillte* was published in Kingston, Ontario (or Upper

[1] See Donald E. Meek (2007). 'Gaelic Printing and Publishing ', in Bill Bell (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 3: Ambition and Industry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 107-22.
[2] See, for example: Sheila M. Kidd (2015). 'Gaelic periodicals in the Lowlands: negotiating change', in Christopher MacLachlan and Ronald W. Renton (eds.), *Gael and Lowlander in Scottish Literature: Cross-currents in Scottish Writing in the Nineteenth Century*. Series: Occasional papers (Association for Scottish Literary Studies) (20). Scottish Literature International: Glasgow, pp. 143-158; Sheila M. Kidd (2013). 'Early Gaelic periodicals: knowledge transfer and impact', in Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy McGuire (eds.), *Rannsachadh na Gaidhlig 6*. An Clò Gàidhealach, University of Aberdeen: Aberdeen, UK, pp. 177-206.

Canada, as it was at the time), although it ceased the next year. In 1851, John Boyd began publishing the monthly *An Cuairtear Òg Gaelach*, in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, which also ran for about a year. Following its demise, Boyd started publishing the Antigonish *Casket* in June, 1852, a weekly newspaper which is still in circulation. At first, it had eight pages, four in Gaelic and four in English, but within three months, the Gaelic content had been reduced to a page, and by the mid-1850s, the Gaelic content amounted to a single item, usually a poem. A Gaelic column continued through the 1860s and sporadically into the early 1870s, and rarely thereafter, until it reappeared in late 1893.[3] A regular column, 'Achadh nan Gàidheal', began appearing in 1920, edited first by Father Donald M. MacAdam—as we shall see, a significant figure in post-*Mac-Talla* publishing in Nova Scotia—and then by Monsignor Patrick J. Nicholson. The column ceased in 1944 when Nicholson, a native Gaelic-speaker from Cape Breton who was a professor of Physics at St. Francis Xavier, was appointed President of the university.[4] The column falls within the period under consideration here, but the focus of this article is on periodicals which had more significant amounts of Gaelic content. One further periodical that deserves to be mentioned in relation to pre-*Mac*-Talla periodical publishing in Canada is *An Gaidheal*, a monthly edited and published by Angus Nicolson, initially based in Toronto in 1871; however, Nicolson returned to Scotland in 1873, and continued publishing the journal in Glasgow until 1877.

[3] See Kenneth Nilsen (2002). 'Some Notes on Pre-*Mac-Talla* Gaelic Publishing in Nova Scotia (with References to Early Gaelic Publishing in Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Ontario)', in Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy R. McGuire (eds.), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Celtic Department; Robert D. Dunbar (in press). 'Gaelic periodicals and the maintenance and creation of networks: Evidence from the Eastern Canadian Gàidhealtachd', in Michel Byrne and Sheila M. Kidd (eds.), *Gaelic Networks*. Glasgow: Celtic and Gaelic, University of Glasgow.

[4] Kenneth Nilsen (2010). 'P. J. Nicholson and 'Achadh nan Gàidheal'', in Wilson McLeod et al (eds.), *Bile ós Chrannaibh: A Festschrift for William Gillies*. Ceann Drochaid, Perthshire: Clann Tuirc, pp. 315-328.

Mac-Talla was the brainchild of Jonathan G. MacKinnon (1869-1944), a native of the village of Dunakin, near Whycocomagh, in Inverness County, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.[5] John Lorne Campbell wrote this of Jonathan Gillies MacKinnon: "[C]ertainly I am of the opinion that there was never in this century a person who was more zealous with regard to the Gaelic language and its literature and history than Jonathan MacKinnon".[6] Recalling his first meeting with MacKinnon in 1932, Campbell reported that "Jonathan MacKinnon was a man of middling height, thick-set, and rather slow in both his movement and his speech. In English, he had a Canadian accent, but in Gaelic, he had an Isle of Skye accent".[7] Campbell added that "[h]is words were so full of good sense and substance, that I have reflected on many occasions that he could have filled a Gaelic chair in any university".[8]

MacKinnon started his education at the local country school at Whycocomagh, but carried on at the secondary level at the Sydney Academy, one of the best secondary schools in Nova Scotia. The Sydney Academy almost certainly had a profound impact on him. Like many such institutions in the far-flung colonies of the British Empire in the late nineteenth century, it was strongly anglo-normative and imperialist in its intellectual orientation. At Sydney Academy, MacKinnon edited the school magazine, 'The Sydney Academy Record', and this appears to have whetted his appetite for both writing and periodical publishing. After finishing his secondary schooling, he did not proceed to higher education, instead turning his energy at the relatively tender age of 22 to *Mac-Talla*. The Sydney Academy did prepare him

[5] A considerable amount of biographical detail is contained in the Jonathan G. MacKinnon fonds at the Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, MG 15.19, and in particular in item B 2. Some of the information contained in this section is derived from this material.

[6] Fear Chanaigh, 'Mac Talla', *An Gàidheal*, vol. XLV (Faoilleach 1950), p. 3: "Oir gu dearbh tha mi am barail nach robh duine riamh anns an linn seo a bha na b'eudmhoire a thaobh na Gàidhlig is a thaobh litreachas is eachdraidh nan Gàidheal nab ha Eòin MacFhionghuin.

[7] MacKinnon's parents were both from Skye.

[8] *Supra*, note 6: "Duine meadhonach àrd, tiugh, car mall 'na dhòigh 's 'na bhruidhinn a bha ann an Eòin MacFhionghuin. Bha blas Chanada air a Bheurla 's blas an eilein Sgitheanaich air a' Ghàidhlig aige"; "Bha a fhaclan cho làn seagh agus brìgh 's gun do smaointich mi, iomadh uair, gum faodadh e cathair ollamh na Gàidhlig a lìonadh ann an oilthigh sam bith".

for life after *Mac-Talla* folded, for MacKinnon went on to hold a number of civil service appointments in Sydney, the principal administrative centre in Cape Breton. By all appearances, he was a diligent and competent civil servant, precisely as would be expected of a graduate of the Sydney Academy. A staunch Presbyterian, he was an elder in St. Andrew's Church, Sydney, a member of its Board of Managers, and a Bible Class teacher.[9]

As Charles Dunn has noted, no subsequent periodical publishing venture in the New World was as successful as *Mac-Talla*,[10] but each of the four publications to be examined here is nonetheless worthy of closer examination, and this contribution marks a first attempt to undertake this task.[11] They are all the product of a roughly twelve year period, from 1922 to 1934, and all emanated from Eastern Nova Scotia. This was a period of great and, indeed, cataclysmic change for the Gaelic language in the region, the single most important Gaelic-speaking area outside of Scotland. The region had been the location of very heavy immigration from the Gaelic-speaking Highlands of Scotland, for a period running from the early 1770s to the 1840s.[12] By as early as the 1880s, if not before, we begin to see outward migration from the region, and evidence that the Gaelic language was coming under some strain. Gaelic had no place in the school system or in any public institution in the province, and there is considerable evidence that the language faced the same sort of hostility that the other Celtic languages were experiencing in Scotland, Ireland and Wales during this period.[13]

Research on the 1901 Canadian census has shown that there were still at least 50,000 Gaelic-speakers in eastern Nova Scotia at that time; it has been estimated that there may have

---

[9] *Supra*, note 5.
[10] Charles W. Dunn (1953; 1980). *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 88.
[11] Extant copies of each of the four periodicals considered here that are held in the Libraries, Archives and Museums Nova Scotia system have been digitised and made available on the Nova Scotia Historical Newspapers Online website, available at: https://librariesns.ca/historical-newspapers. The author is in the process of creating a detailed index for all Gaelic material available through this website.
[12] Michael Kennedy (2002). *Gaelic Nova Scotia: An Economic, Cultural, and Social Impact Study*. Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, pp. 20-26.
[13] *Ibid*, pp. 39-62.

been as many as 100,000 Gaelic-speakers there at its peak, in the middle of the nineteenth century. The language had weakened in much of Pictou County and in parts of Antigonish County, on the eastern Nova Scotia mainland, but there were many districts in rural Cape Breton in which Gaelic-speakers made up between 80 and 100 per cent of the population.[14] However, in the twentieth century Gaelic continued to be excluded from virtually all domains of social power and denied any real role in the institutional infrastructure of the province of Nova Scotia, including in the educational system. Industrialisation connected to the development of coal mining and steel production, the concomitant urbanisation, and the increasing pressure on the rural farming and fishing economy, contributed to a sharp and steady decline in the number of Gaelic-speakers in subsequent years.[15]

According to the Canadian census, by 1931 there were 24,303 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia as a whole, meaning that the numbers of speakers in eastern Nova Scotia effectively been cut in half over the preceding thirty years.[16] During his first visit to the province in 1932, John Lorne Campbell conducted a survey of the language in the region, by contacting clergy in every parish in eastern Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. His results both confirmed the general picture provided by the census,[17] and provided more demographic detail. In particular, Campbell's survey showed that the language was in steep decline on the mainland, and while it was still spoken by a majority in many districts in Cape Breton, even in many of these areas it was weakening. Most significantly, Campbell's survey showed that the use of the language among younger people was declining, with very low rates of Gaelic usage amongst the young outside of a few core Gaelic-speaking areas in Cape

[14] Jonathan Dembling (2006). 'Gaelic in Canada: new evidence from an old census', in Wilson McLeod, James Fraser and Anja Gunderloch (eds.), *Cànan & Cultur / Language & Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 3*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press. 203-14.
[15] Kennedy, *supra*, note 6, at pp.
[16] Dominion Bureau of Statistics. n.d. *Bulletin XLII: Gaelic Mother Tongue*. Copy in Beaton Institute Archives.
[17] John Lorne Campbell (1990). *Songs Remembered in Exile*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, p. 33. Campbell had enumerated 15,425 Gaelic-speakers in his survey, but he noted that the survey was incomplete, and that he would not have been surprised if the actual number of speakers was twice as large as that.

Breton. Research conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the linguistic anthropologist Elizabeth Mertz has shown that during the 1930s, the language appears to have reached a 'tipping point', with parents in two core Gaelic-speaking communities, Mabou and the North Shore, deciding actively not to pass the language on in the home.[18] In short, the period in which these periodicals were being published coincided with a linguistic and social-cultural crisis in Gaelic Nova Scotia.

All four of the publications under consideration here were concerned with addressing this crisis in some way, and this, together with the ways in which the crisis is apparent in the pages of these publication, will be the focus of this contribution. The first to appear was *Mosgladh* ('Awakening'), which was launched in 1922 by the Scottish Catholic Society of Canada. The Scottish Catholic Society of Canada was founded on 1 July 1919 at Iona, Cape Breton by Father Donald M. MacAdam (1867-1924).[19] MacAdam, a native of East Bay, Cape Breton, was a graduate of St. Francis Xavier University, who went on to study science at McGill University and at Harvard, before training for the priesthood in Montreal and receiving ordination in 1893. During his time at St. Francis Xavier between 1893 and 1900, he offered classes in Celtic Studies, although it appears that MacAdam had also offered a class in Gaelic as early as 1891.[20] These were the first sustained courses in Celtic Studies and on the Gaelic language that were taught there. He also organised a Gaelic society at the university.[21]

[18] Elizabeth Mertz (1989). 'Sociolinguistic creativity: Cape Breton Gaelic's linguistic "tip"', in Nancy Dorian (ed.), *Investigating Obsolence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 103-16.
[19] The Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Scottish Catholic Society of Canada fonds, MG.6.26.
[20] *The Canadian-American Gael*, vol. 1. Sydney, Nova Scotia, 1943, p. 87.
[21] Kennedy, *supra*, note 12, at p. 75.

The Scottish Catholic Society of Canada had four explicit aims.[22] The first was the preservation of the Catholic faith among Catholic Scots, and "the dissemination of a more accurate knowledge of the teachings of our holy religion among Scots who are not Catholics". The second was "the removal of bias and prejudice in the study of Scottish history". The third was "the advancement, educationally, morally, and socially, of all Catholics of the Scottish Race". Finally, the fourth was "the preservation and study of the Gaelic language and literature, and the traditions of the Scottish race".[23] The Society was specifically concerned with the decline of rural life, and the more oppressive and morally questionable side of life in the growing urban centres. However, it is also clear that its more general concern was with the rapid social and cultural changes that were buffeting the Gaelic speaking Catholic heartlands of eastern Nova Scotia. The Society had a middle class hue: over half of its 73 founding members were professional people—clergy, professors, judges, lawyers, and so forth.[24] Within a short period of time, the society had founded cells in many locations in Cape Breton and in Antigonish county on the neighbouring Nova Scotia mainland, all traditional centres of strong Gaelic immigration.[25] In 1920, the Society spearheaded a petition to the Nova Scotia legislature to introduce Gaelic as a subject in the Nova Scotia curriculum, which was signed by 5,468 individuals from over 230 communities throughout eastern Nova Scotia and from further afield, mainly, but not exclusively, from Catholic communities. In response, in 1921 the legislature approved Gaelic as an optional subject in Nova Scotia schools. However, the development of teachers was almost non-existent.[26] The Scottish Catholic Society sought to address this shortage, and assembled an

[22] Scottish Catholic Society of Canada fonds, *supra*, note 13, item C 1, Constitution and By-laws, 1920. See also *Mosgladh*,
[23] These were published, in English, in the second issue: Leabhar I, Aireamh 2, An t-Earrach 1923, p. 13.
[24] Kennedy, *supra*, note 12, at p. 77.
[25] *Ibid*, pp. 77-78. For an account of the activities of the society, see also John G. Gibson (2017). *Gaelic Cape Breton Step-Dancing: An Historical and Ethnographic Perspective*. Montreal and Kingston: Mc-Gill-Queen's University Press, pp. 96-103.
[26] Kennedy, *supra*, note 12, at pp. 77-79.

education committee and secured the services of Jonathan G. MacKinnon to provide night courses in Gaelic, and in 1923 and 1924, a "Gaelic School" with three teachers and three classes (adults, pre-schoolers, and a grammar class, in which Gaelic was studied in the manner of the classics) was held in the Sydney Lyceum, sponsored wholly by the Scottish Catholic Society. In 1926, it was moved to Sydney Academy Annex. The society also sponsored Gaelic night classes in Sydney Mines, New Waterford, Glace Bay, Boisdale, Christmas Island and Iona. However, this initiative met with little success in terms of institutionalising the language more widely in the school system.[27]

Of *Mosgladh*, Professor Dunn notes that its columns never attained the originality achieved by *Mac-Talla* and were written only partly in Gaelic and quite extensively in English.[28] *Mosgladh* was launched in the spring of 1922, under the slogan 'Glòir Dhè agus Math ar Cinnidh" ("To the Glory of Good and the Good of our Race"). The very first article, in English, was entitled 'The Scottish Catholic Society—Why It Is Needed', and a quite remarkable reflection on Canadian multiculturalism, given that it preceded by forty years the Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of the 1960s, which brought the question of multiculturalism to the public attention and which ultimately led to the development of multiculturalism as a policy and a defining constitutional value.[29] In the early post-World War I period, official Canadian policy and prevailing attitudes in English-speaking Canada were strongly anglo-normative and, indeed, assimilationist,[30] and the *Mosgladh* article provided a strong counter-narrative. The article began with this passage:

> For those who are well disposed [to the Society], it is indeed superfluous [to give reasons or make apologies for the organisation of the Society], since to them nothing

[27] *Ibid*, pp. 79-80.
[28] Dunn, *supra*, note 10, at p. 88.
[29] See Robert Dunbar (2013). 'Understanding Canadian Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity in a 21st Century Context from a "Celtic" Perspective'. In Michael Newton (ed.), *Celts in the Americas*, Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, pp. 117-144.
[30] *Ibid*.

> seems more natural and reasonable than that they should endeavour to spread the knowledge of the history and traditions of the noble race from which they are sprung and to preserve the ancient, venerable, and mellifluous tongue now in danger of being lost to us forever unless we translate our oft-expressed love for it into prompt and vigorous action. There are those, however, even among the members of our own race, who view the movement with anything but favour. . . . They say that the maintaining of national distinctions is all very well in Europe where nearly every nationality can enjoy its own separate existence in its own country; but that here in Canada men of all nations must live together under the protection of the one flag, obeying the same laws, and uniting their efforts to procure the welfare of their common country. Therefore, they add, national distinctions should be recognized only to be destroyed as quickly as possible, since they keep our people apart and retard the development of a true Canadian national spirit. In other words the work we are doing is not practical, it is un-Canadian, it is reactionary.[31]

The author is clearly concerned about fellow Gaels who are either demoralised about the prospect of maintaining a Gaelic identity in Canada or who positively seek to assimilate—and we must remember that assimilation is taking place quite rapidly at this very time. The author went on to suggest that the maintenance of the Gaelic language and cultural traditions, of a knowledge of Gaelic history and, generally, the preservation of a Gaelic identity was crucial in combatting population loss and in improving rural conditions.[32] The author then provided what was, in effect, a stout defence of multilingualism and multiculturalism in response to charge that language and cultural maintenance were unpatriotic objectives:

> It stands to reason, surely, that the better we understand ourselves the easier it will be to understand the viewpoint of others and the better we know our own history the more sympathetic will be our attitude towards the legitimate aims and aspirations of other races . . . . We can all be good Canadians and still remain Scottish, or Irish, or French, or English. The French outnumber any other single race in Canada. They are intensely Canadian in sentiment and yet are most persistently attached to the national tongue and loyal to the national traditions. Except for a few fanatics, no one pretends to be seriously alarmed for the future of Canada because of the attitude of French Canadians. Most people take the sensible view that those who make their homes in Canada are sufficiently interested in the country to work for that end, no matter how strongly attached they may be to the race from which they are sprung. The attempt to separate people from their national characteristics . . . under the impression that it makes for truer Canadian unity, is as unnecessary as it is unnatural. Moreover, even if

[31] 'The Scottish Catholic Society—Why It Is Needed', *Mosgladh*, Leabhar I, Aireamh 1, An t-Earrach 1922, p. 11.
[32] *Ibid*, pp. 11-13.

> it could succeed it would leave the country no richer in material, and decidedly poorer in spiritual things . . . .[33]

Mosgladh was intended to serve as a medium for the maintenance of cultural traditions, and to foster positive attitudes to the language by increasing its prestige.

The importance that *Mosgladh* placed on Gaelic language maintenance is illustrated by the fact that the second article in the first issue also dealt with this topic. The author, identified only by the initials 'D.M.E', made this observation (also in English):

> What are we doing to keep alive the language of the Celt? Not much that is likely to prove effective. The efforts of a few individuals, no matter how zealous and persistent, can accomplish but little. Highland games, Scottish concerts, bagpipe music, Highland dancing, are all popular but they scarcely help to perpetuate the Gaelic language. There is one way and one way only of keeping the language alive, and one that costs nothing. And the way is this, that everybody who to-day speaks Gaelic should be proud of the accomplishment, should always speak it and nothing else to those who understand the language, and especially that Gaelic-speaking parents should teach their children Gaelic from their infancy.[34]

The author shows the an awareness of the central importance to language maintenance of transmission of the language in the home, something on which the leading figure in modern theorising on minority language maintenance, Joshua Fishman, has placed much emphasis.[35] The sense of linguistic crisis which is conveyed in this article is apparent in other articles in the first and many subsequent issues.[36] However, the author also made this assertion:

> But after all we who speak the language are most to blame. Gaelic books are plentiful and cheap, yet very few of us can read them, simply because we lack the good will to devote a few moments of our spare time to the study of our mother tongue. We do not even take the trouble to speak it, when there is the opportunity to do so.[37]

---

[33] *Ibid*, p. 15.
[34] 'Suas leis a' Ghaidhlig', *Mosgladh*, Leabhar I, Aireamh I, An t-Earrach 1922, p. 17.
[35] See Joshua A. Fishman (1991). *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Fishman refers to this process as 'intergenerational transmission' of the minoritised language. It should be noted, though, that more recent scholarship has been somewhat critical of the emphasis Fishman places on intergenerational transmission: see, for example, Suzanne Romaine (2006). 'Planning for the Survival of Linguistic Diiversity'. *Language Policy* 5:2, pp. 443-475.
[36] 'Ar Dleasnas d'on Ghaidhlig', ('Our Responsibility to Gaelic'), Leabhar I, Aireamh I, An t-Earrach, 1922, p. 29; 'Shoulder to Shoulder', Leabhar I, Aireamh III, An Samhradh 1923, p. 40.
[37] *Supra*, note 34, p. 18.

The author fails to consider the context which has contributed to this state of affairs, such as the social dominance of institutions which operate exclusively through the medium of English and of broader language attitudes and ideologies in Nova Scotian and broader Canadian society at the time, which were strongly assimilationist.[38] Despite the obvious commitment of periodicals such as *Mosgladh* to Gaelic linguistic and cultural maintenance in the communities they served, there is a persistent inability or reluctance to address these fundamental questions.

Mosgladh was initially intended to appear quarterly, although the second issue did not appear until the spring of 1923; two additional issues did appear in the following quarters, and then the journal appears to have been a significant hiatus. The early issues were fairly large. The first issue contained forty pages of content, along with several pages of advertisements at the beginning and end, and the subsequent issues also contained many pages of advertising and between forty and fifty pages of content. The advertisements were generally in English, but like those in *Mac-Talla*, they give a very interesting picture of commercial life in eastern Nova Scotia at the time of publication. When the journal was revived in 1928, it had become a monthly publication, but was much shorter—only eight pages (although it was briefly expanded to sixteen pages)—and had relatively little advertising. There appears to have been an hiatus of several months in 1929 and again for most of 1930; thereafter, it came out regularly until December 1932.[39]

Mosgladh was not a newspaper—it was never intended to be one—and did not contain any real news; it was a cultural and religious journal. In the early issues, there were roughly equal amounts of English and Gaelic content, but in the revived journal English

[38] Dunbar, *supra*, note 29.
[39] Joseph J MacInnes fonds, Beaton Institute Archives, MG 6.20, Item 1, which, among other things, contain subscription lists for Mosgladh for 1928-1931.

predominated. Although the Scottish Catholic Society was committed to Gaelic linguistic and cultural maintenance, it was also centrally concerned with spiritual matters, and in a rapidly changing linguistic environment the society seems to have decided that the faithful, as well as those non-Catholic Scots whom it also wanted to inform about the faith, needed to be reached in both English and Gaelic. The journal carried a significant number of Gaelic songs, many composed locally, and it remains a valuable source for Gaelic song-poetry. It contained many items on Scottish and Gaelic history as well as local history, including local church history. We find, for example, an article in Gaelic on the first Gaelic-speaking priest in Canada, Father James MacDonald, and with it an account of the Glenaladale Settlement in of Prince Edward Island in 1772.[40] In the same issue, there is an account in English of Bishop Fraser, who came to Nova Scotia in 1822 and was subsequently made Bishop for the diocese of Antigonish and Cape Breton in 1827.[41]

There was an ongoing series of articles, in English, entitled 'Notes on Scottish History' and in the first of these, on the Wars of Montrose, which appeared in the second issue, by a writer identified only as 'Clanranald'. The writer, and by extension the editor, were concerned that the descendants of the Gaels were getting an incomplete and, indeed, biased account of their own history:

> English prejudice against the Celt has coloured most of what English historians have written on this and kindred subjects, and they furnish the inspiration for our own ultraloyal compilers of school histories. For instance, the "Ontario High School History of England" (England, mark you, not the British Isles), prescribed by the Council of Public Instruction for use in the schools of Nova Scotia, and, I presume, approved by the Advisory Board, has this to say, and nothing more of Montrose's campaign: "He raised a force in the Highlands, and, during 1644 and 1645, won a series of brilliant victories. But the methods of the men who fought for him aroused horror and anger. Among them were some traiped soldiers brought over from Ireland, but Montrose's force consisted chiefly of Highlanders who waged war like savages, cared for little else than plunder, and killed men, it was said, as light-heartedly as they would kill chickens. They were chiefly of the clan of the Macdonalds, and committed

[40] 'A' Chiad Shagart Gaidhealach an Canada', Leabhar I, Aireamh III, p. 43.
[41] 'Bishop Fraser', Leabhar I, Aireamh III, p. 20.

> fearful atrocities against their old enemies, the Campbells, the clansmen of the Marquis of Argyle, the Presbyterian leader . . .".[42]

Noting the blatantly one-sided nature of this standard history used in the schools, the author concluded as follows:

> It is not well to perpetuate race hatred, but simply justice demands that the history of our race be fairly written, and that we do all we can to offset the systematic attempt to inoculate our young people with pro-Saxon and anti-Celtic prejudice. "Mosgladh" will try to do its share of the work. When the truth is set before them, our children will learn that they have a right to be proud of the race from which they are sprung, and will find inspiration in its record of generous, unselfish devotion to the causes it supported, of chivalrous courage and brilliant achievement.[43]

In the 'Notes on Scottish History', again by 'Clanranald', which appeared in the revived periodical in 1928, similar points are made:

> It is part of our duty as members of the Scottish Catholic Society to make ourselves better acquainted with the history of Scotland and the Scottish race. All the knowledge of this subject which most of us have acquired has been obtained from text-books written with a distinct anti-Celtic bias. We get the English view-point in everything. We find them representing our Highland ancestors as barbarians, to whom the blessings of civilization came only when they were made completely subject to English rule—that is, after Scottish nobles took their bribe and sold their country and their honor at once by passing the Act which united the parliaments of England and Scotland—of which there will be more to say later on—and after the rising of 1745 had given the excuse for the destruction of the ancient clan system. We shall attempt, therefore, to give from month to month brief notes on Scottish history, setting before our readers the conclusions of the best Scottish authorities on the subject.[44]

Thus, *Mosgladh* was intended as a vehicle for redressing the effects of the mainstream English-language schooling which Nova Scotian Gaels were receiving. Unsurprisingly, given that the society and the periodical were the creations of Catholics of West Highland and Hebridean descent, these accounts were staunchly Jacobite in their sympathies and, as this last entry illustrates, sympathetic to Scottish nationalism.

---

[42] *Ibid*, p. 60.
[43] *Ibid*, p. 62.
[44] Vol. 1, No. 2, March 1928, p. 2. Note how the identification of the issue had changed from Gaelic to English.

In the revived, significantly smaller periodical which began appearing in 1928, English now predominated. There were still many Gaelic songs, some Gaelic stories, reprints of Gaelic material from earlier sources, and articles on various aspects of Scottish and Highland history. With the April 1928 edition, some Gaelic lessons began to appear. While the journal was clearly interested in disseminating material in Gaelic and English and in trying to maintain the language, it generally did not challenge the social dominance of English at an institutional level.

The second periodical, *Teachdaire nan Gàidheal*, which began publication in 1924, was the brainchild of James H. MacNeil (1869-1939), a native of Irish Vale, Cape Breton. A teacher for over 35 years in Cape Breton schools, he was the Gaelic editor of the *Sydney Post Record*, which, like the *Casket*, was an English language newspaper which had a Gaelic column during the period under consideration here.[45] He was also a determined campaigner on behalf of the language, arguing vociferously for some provision for Gaelic in the local school system; in 1937, he convinced the local Canadian Broadcasting Corporation affiliate to include a regular Gaelic radio programme, 'Celtic Ceilidh', in its schedule.[46] *Teachdaire nan Gàidheal* was published monthly from January 1924 until February 1934, although as Prof. Dunn has noted, there were "long and painful intervals between the appearance of the various numbers, so that the paper lost its continuity and presumably a good proportion of its paying adherents". Dunn also noted that MacNeil followed MacKinnon's example and incorporated his newspaper with a thousand shares to be issued at $10 per a share. Dunn concluded by saying that, through his efforts with *Teachdaire nan Gàidheal* and in the columns of the *Sydney Post Record* MacNeil "succeeded in preserving oral literature from

[45] Gibson, *supra*, note 25, at pp. 97-98.
[46] Kennedy, *supra*, note 12, at p. 84, 225.

extinction", but that "in common with other enthusiasts his labours brought him neither wealth nor fame".[47]

In many respects, the paper took up the mantle of *Mac-Talla*. Each issue contained some news items of local, national or international interest, usually set out in the first few pages. The paper was usually eight pages in length, although for a brief period in the early years it expanded to sixteen pages. Unlike *Mosgladh*, *Teachdaire nan Gàidheal* was an all-Gaelic publication, although from early 1928, it began adding an English-language supplement under the name 'Gaelic Herald', which expanded to several pages over time. This is clearly a recognition of the changing linguistic realities—MacNeil was clearly trying to maintain a readership base by providing material in the only language which an increasing number of people in eastern Nova Scotia could understand, English.

As to its purposes, the editor made reference in the very first article in the first issue of *Teachdaire nan Gàidheal* to the 'Gluasad Gàidhealach',[48] the Gaelic Movement in Scotland in which An Comunn Gaidhealach was involved.[49] This movement encompassed the recent efforts of An Comunn to have Gaelic introduced in Scottish schools, and the editor clearly hoped to encourage through the paper a similar movement in Nova Scotia, pointing to some efforts in this direction, such as those of the Scottish Catholic Society. The purpose of the paper was to give an opportunity to Gaels to better understand their history, to expand the language, to reach Gaels wherever they have settled, and to provide an opportunity to Gaelic poets and writers to offer their ideas to other Gaels.[50] In another early editorial comment, the expressed objective of the periodical was to give Gaelic speakers the opportunity to maintain

---

[47] *Supra*, note 10, at p. 89.

[48] 'An Gluasad Gaidhealach', Leabh. I, Air. 1, 15th of December ('15mh de'n Nollaig), 1924, at p. 1.

[49] For an account of the origins and history of An Comunn, see Frank Thompson (1992). *History of An Comunn Gaidhealach: the first hundred (1891-1991), centenary of An Comunn Gaidhealach*. Inverness: An Comunn Gàidhealach.

[50] Leabh. I, Air. 1 15h of December ('15mh de'n Nollaig'), 1924, at p. 4.

their language, while implying that Gaels had not been doing so.[51] The editor noted, however, that the paper would not take sides in debates either about the state of the language or about party politics.[52] He also implored even those who do not read Gaelic to get the paper: "Ged nach leugh thu Gaidhlig faigh an Teachdaire 'n ad dhachaigh. Anns an oidhche fhada geamhraidh nuair thig do chairdean 'gad shealltuinn bi daonnan caraid coir na measg a leughas Gaidhlig, agus bheir an Teachdaire seachad sgeulachdan, orainn, is naigheachdan a bhios gle thaistneach leis an fearas-chuideachd".[53]This is precisely what the periodical did provide, and it remains a valuable source of songs, especially locally composed songs, a variety of material regarding Highland history and cultural traditions, proverbs, and riddles. Like *Mosgladh*, it also provided at some Gaelic lessons, although these were not sustained.

The third periodical was *An Solus Iùil* ('The Beacon'), published between 1925 and 1927 in Sydney, Cape Breton. Although intended to be a monthly, it appeared more infrequently than that after the first few months. Each issue was eight pages long, mainly in Gaelic, with at most a page or two of English text at the end of each issue, dealing primarily with United Church of Canada matters. Of all the periodicals discussed here, *An Solus Iùil* contained by far the smallest amount of content,[54] but it is no less interesting a publication for that. It appears to have been supported by the United Church—it contained no advertising, suggesting that it had other sources of support—although many details of its publication, including the identity of its editor, are unclear.[55] The United Church was formed on 10 June

---

[51] Leabh. I, Air. 3, 15th of February ('15mh de'n Ghearran) 1925.
[52] *Supra*, note 50.
[53] *Ibid*: "In the long winter nights, when your friends come to see you there will always be a good friend in the company who can read Gaelic and the Teachdaire will provide stories, songs and news that will provide very pleasant entertainment".
[54] The author has seen only the 11 eleven issues, amounting to 88 pages, available on the Nova Scotia Historical Newspapers Online website, *supra*, note 6.
[55] Michael Newton has suggested that its editor was James MacNeil, of *Teachdaire nan Gàidheal*: Michael Newton (18 August 2013). 'Gaelic Tradition, Gender and Alcohol', The Virtual Gael blogspot: https://virtualgael.wordpress.com/2013/08/18/gaelic-tradition-gender-and-alcohol/. However, it would be surprising if MacNeil, a Roman Catholic, would be chosen to edit a paper associated with a new Protestant denomination.

1925 as a union of the Methodist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian Churches of Canada. There was some opposition to the union in all of the churches, and particularly within the Presbyterian Church, and its congregations were given the right to vote on whether to become part of the new church. Ultimately, all 4,797 Methodist congregations and all but eight of the 174 Congregational churches voted to participate in the union. There were greater divisions within the Presbyterian Church, and ultimately 784 of the 4,512 Presbyterian congregations chose to remain outside of the new Church;[56] many congregations experienced conflict, and families and communities were often pitted against each other.[57] There had been considerable opposition to the union in Gaelic-speaking areas of eastern Nova Scotia, resentment lingered, and many Gaelic-speakers came to the view that the union of the churches represented a setback for the language.[58] These ongoing cleavages in Presbyterian opinion are evident in the pages of *An Solus Iùil*.

The periodical favoured the union of the Churches. An early issue, published in March, 1925, in advance of the formal union, indicated that *An Solus Iùil* was published under the authority of the Council for the Union of the Presbyterian Church[59]; later issues provide no indication of the authority under which it was published. A subsequent early issue indicated and that the editors had received requests from many quarters that the journal should continue, so that people could receive a little more information about the new Church,

[56] C.T. McIntire (2012). 'Unity among Many: The Formation of the United Church of Canada, 1899-1925', in Don Schweitzer (ed.), *The United Church of Canada: A History*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, pp. 3-37, at pp. 8-9. See, generally, Phyllis D. Airhart (2013). *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, and Schweitzer (2012).
[57] *Ibid*, p. 25.
[58] See Michael Newton (ed.) (2015). *Seanchaidh na Coille / Memory-Keeper of the Forest: Anthology of Scottish Gaelic Literature of Canada*. Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, p. 362. Newton includes a poem by the Cape Breton poet Murchadh Moireasdan (Murdo Morrison) which is critical of the union: pp. 363-369.
[59] Leabh. I, Air. 3, Am Màrt 1925, p. 4: "Tha an Solus Iuil air a chur a mach fo ughdaras Comhairl-Aonaidh na h-Eaglaise Cleirich an Canada".

among other things, in their own language.[60] In a later issue, the paper claimed that it published for the benefit of all Gaelic speakers, but especially those who belonged to the United Church.[61] Thus, the periodical's objectives were somewhat different from those of the other three periodicals under consideration here. While, like the other publications, it sought to support the maintenance of the language by providing suitable written material to its readers, it was centrally concerned with helping Gaelic-speakers, and Gaelic-speaking members of the Presbyterian Church in particular, to come to terms with the transition to the United Church of Canada.

An interesting feature of *An Solus Iùil* was its use of the 'Còmhradh', or 'Conversation', a literary genre which was developed in the earliest Gaelic periodicals in Scotland and became an important one in Gaelic prose literature in the nineteenth century.[62] These fictional conversations usually employed stock figures who were intended to be representative of certain types of characters commonly encountered in Gaelic communities. They were used as a means of discussing important social issues, including emigration, education, politics, and church matters—many of these conversations related to the schism in the Church of Scotland which led to the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. These conversations were often used by clerical authors such as the Rev. Dr. Norman MacLeod, 'Caraid nan Gàidheal' (1783-1862), one of the major figures in nineteenth century Gaelic literature and a pioneer of the genre, as a means of attempting to exercise social control and mould opinion.[63] Although Nova Scotian Gaelic periodicals frequently printed

[60] Leabh. I, Air. 1, An Lùnasdal 1925, 'An Solus Iùil', p. 1: "Thainig fios a caochladh chearnan uaithe sin gu'm bu toiogh le luchd na Gailig gu'n leante air a chur a mach, a chum 's gu'm biodh cothrom aca air beagan fiosrachaidh mu'n Eaglais 's mu nithean eile fhaighinn na'n cainnt fein."
[61] Leabh. I, Air. 7, An t-Òg-mhios 1926, 'An Solus Iùil', p. 52: "Tha e air a chur a mach air son math luchd na Gailig gu h-iomlan, ach gu sonruichte air an son-san a bhuineas do Eaglais Aonaichte Chanada."
[62] See, generally, Sheila M. Kidd (ed.) (2016). *Còmhraidhean nan Cnoc: the Nineteenth-Century Gaelic Prose Dialogue*. Glasgow: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.
[63] Sheila M. Kidd (2000). 'Social Control and Social Criticism: The Dialogue in Nineteenth-Century Gaelic Literature'. *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20, 67-87; Sheila M. Kidd (2002). 'Caraid nan Gaidheal and "Friend of Emigration": Gaelic Emigration Literature of the 1840s'. *Scottish Historical Review* 81:1, 52-69; Sheila M. Kidd

these conversations, the overwhelming majority were reprints of ones which had been written and published earlier in Scottish-based periodicals.

Two conversations, both entitled 'Comhradh a' Ghlinne' ('The Conversation of the Glen'), were published in *An Solus Iùil*. Both were clearly composed by a Canadian-based author—as in the large majority of articles, the author was not identified—as the first concerned the creation of the United Church and the second concerned rural depopulation in Nova Scotia and emigration to sunnier climes in the United States such as California and Florida. Both featured only two characters, 'Ruairidh Ùr' ('Young Roddy') and 'Alasdair Donn' ('Brown-haired Alexander'). In both, Alasdair was finally won over to Ruairidh's point of view. In the first of these, published shortly before the union,[64] Alasdair expresses some doubts about the wisdom of the union. Ruairidh points out that their minister—"fear a rugadh agus a thogadh 'nar duthaich fhein, fear air am bheil sinn eolach, a bheir dhuinn an Soisgeul an cainnt ar mathar, a tha 'saothreachadh gu cruaidh 'nar measg a shamradh 's a gheamhradh . . ."[65], and who is far more knowledgeable than the two of them in Church matters—supports the union. On the other side are people who are not locals, who they do not know, and who do not speak their language. He goes on to argue that a continuing Presbyterian Church will have difficulties locating ministers, and many churches will have to close, and concludes this thrust of his arguments as follows: "Is gnothuch nar a bhi breugadh sluaigh air falbh o'n Eaglais gun chinnt sam bith gu'm bi ministeirean aca san Eaglais uir d'an teid iad".[66] Later, Ruairidh describes the arguments of those opposed to the union as 'rolaistean', ludicrous or absurd tales. In an issue published shortly after the union, under the

(2007). 'Tormod MacLeòid: Àrd-Chonsal nan Gàidheal', in Sheila M. Kidd (ed.), *Glasgow: Baile Mòr nan Gàidheal / City of the Gaels*. Glasgow: Roinn na Ceiltis, Oilthigh Ghlaschu, pp. 107-129.

[64] Leabh. I, Air. 3, Am Mart 1925, pp. 1-4.

[65] "A man who was born and raised in our own country, a man we know well, who gives us the Gospel in our mothers' tongue, who is working hard amongst us in summer and winter . . .".

[66] "It's a shameful thing to be drawing people away from the Church with lies, without any certainty that there will be ministers in the new church to which they will be going."

title ‘Gairm gu Sith’ (‘A Call to Peace’), the periodical took a more conciliatory approach. It noted that the ‘battle’ (‘cath’) was over and that many in the Presbyterian Church chose not to enter the union, hoped for an eventual reconciliation, and emphasised the need for patience, and to avoid hostility and malice.[67]

The second conversation was motivated by secular rather than spiritual concerns, and is clearly aimed at addressing the problem of depopulation—as noted earlier, a significant factor in the social and linguistic crisis afflicting Gaelic communities in eastern Nova Scotia at the time.[68] Alasdair began by complaining about the long winters and poor spring times, and short summers, and laments that their ancestors had not emigrated to a place with a better climate more suitable for farming. Ruairidh responded by saying that no one is in a perfect situation, and that it is not one’s situation but how one responds to that situation which counts towards personal happiness. He noted that many who emigrated to California or Florida subsequently returned, finding things were not as easy as they had expected—“Is gorm na beanntan a tha fas as!”[69]—and that people did not value enough the benefits of life in Nova Scotia.[70] Alasdair then backtracked, and admitted that there was much to recommend their part of the world. Ruairidh concluded: “Ach, gun fhacal breige, tha duthaich mhaiseach, mhath againn, agus is ann a’ dol na’s fhearr a bhitheas i. Tha e ’na chomharradh gliocais air daoine bhith ’fuireach innte, mar a rinn sinn fhein”.[71]

As might be expected, there was a considerable amount of spiritual or at least clerical content in *An Solus Iùil*, although there was also secular material. In addition to reports on

[67] Leabh. I, Air. 1, An Lunasdal 1925, p. 1.
[68] Leabh. I, Air. 3, An t-Samhuinn 1925, pp. 20-22.
[69] “Green are the hills that are far away” (i.e. the grass is always greener on the other side).
[70] *Ibid*, p. 21.
[71] “But, without a word of a lie, we have a beautiful, good land, and it just keeps getting better. It is a mark of wisdom that people are staying here, just as we have done”.

United Church matters in both Gaelic and English, there were memorials to ministers,[72] reflections on scriptural passages,[73] a profile of Dugald Buchanan,[74] the great eighteenth century Gaelic religious poet,[75] a Gaelic hymn composed by the respected Cape Breton poet Kenneth Ferguson,[76] and a detailed account of Gaelic psalm singing,[77] which was prefaced by a statement of ethnic pride of the sort which was common in the periodicals considered here, and which could be interpreted as a means of addressing the crisis facing Nova Scotian Gaelic communities at that time. With regard to the secular, the editor clearly had an interest in international affairs, providing, for example, an account of the League of Nations ('Co-bhann nan Cinneach') in which the author notes that it has not produced all of the benefits expected of it but expresses the hope that it will in time.[78] There was a sympathetic account of the British Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone (1809-1898),[79] and of Lloyd George's policy of land reform,[80] as well as a report that was highly critical of Mussolini.[81]

Finally, we return to Jonathan G. MacKinnon. In 1928, he launched *Fear na Ceilidh*. It was a much more modest publication than *Mac-Talla*. It appeared only monthly between March 1928 and June 1930, although there were a couple of breaks, with the result that only 21 issues appeared. Each issue contained eight rather small pages, all in Gaelic. In the first

---

[72] 'Maighstir Alasdair', a memorial to Ref. Alasdair MacFhearchair, who came to Cape Breton in 1833, Leabh. I, Air. 7, An t-Og-mhios, 1926, pp. 50-51. 'Maighstir Seumas Friseal', Leabh. I, Air. 9, An t-Sultain 1926, pp. 64-65.
[73] 'Am Buachaille', a reflection on Psalm 23:1, Leabh. I, Air. 5, Am Faoileach 1926; 'Geallaidhean Dhe', a reflection on Genesis 8: 22, Leabh. I, Air. 7, An t-Og-mhios 1926, p. 49.
[74] Leabh. I, Air. 4, An Dudhlachd 1925, pp. 28-30.
[75] For the definitive scholarly edition of his poems and accompanying biographic essay, see Dòmhnall Eachann Meek (deas.) (2015). *Laoidhean Spioradail Dhùghaill Bhochanain: Deasachadh Ùr is Ath-sgrùdadh air Beatha is Saothair a' Bhàird*. Glaschu: Comann Litreachas Gàidhlig na h-Alba.
[76] 'Crìosd anns an Stoirm', Leabh. I, Air. 4, An Dudhlachd 1925, p. 25.
[77] Leabh. I, Air. 2, An Sultuine 1925, pp. 11-12.
[78] Leabh. I, Air. 3, An t-Samhuinn 1925, pp. 17-18; see, also, 'Bliadhna na Sithe', Leabh. I, Air. 4, An Dudhlachd 1925, p. 26.
[79] Leabh. I, Air. 2, An Sultuine 1925, pp. 13-14.
[80] Leabh. I, Air. 5, Am Faoileach 1926, pp. 34-35; see Ian Packer (2001). *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The Land Issue and Party Politics in England, 1906-1914*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society Studies in History.
[81] 'Mussolini', Leabh. I, Air. 7, An t-Og-mhios, 1926, pp. 53-54.

two or three pages, MacKinnon provided a mix of news stories, usually accompanied by a wry comment, often drawing on a well-known Gaelic proverb.

MacKinnon's entire life was dedicated to the Gaelic language, and he saw publications such as *Mac-Talla* and *Fear na Cèilidh* as absolutely essential as media for the preservation and dissemination of Gaelic culture, and as means for enhancing the prestige of the language and its speakers. In a passage from an unpublished English language manuscript, 'Highland Scots in Cape Breton', MacKinnon wrote the following:

> Also, the world had to get its knowledge of the Highland Scots almost wholly through the Lowland Scots, and the latter, influenced by centuries of hostility and warfare, seldom spoke well of the Highlander if there was anything ill to say. As a matter of fact, the Lowland Scots did not know the Highland Scots . . . .
>
> Material gathered from such sources might be thought quite unsuitable in written history or even the better class of fiction, but it was freely used in both, with the result that the Highland Scot was described as being uncouth and barbarous, scantily clad, half-starved and illiterate; and charged with being irreligious, superstitious, unfaithful, disloyal and dishonest. *And once these descriptions appeared in print, later writers from time to time repeated them, in utter disregard of their own duty to ascertain the facts*.[82] (emphasis added).

One strongly suspects that MacKinnon understood both *Mac-Talla* and *Fear na Céilidh* as being the means by which such ignorance and the resultant disinformation could best be combatted, particularly amongst fellow Gaels who, like him, were increasingly exposed to such one-sided narratives through an English-only education system and through English media. In this, his outlook was very similar to that of the editor of *Mosgladh*. The passage also shows MacKinnon's keen understanding of the power of print in shaping perceptions; it is unsurprising that he turned to print in order to set the record straight.

Although John Lorne Campbell was a valued friend and supporter of MacKinnon and a great fan of *Mac-Talla*, he also noted that the newspaper "was imperialist and a firm supporter of the temperance movement".[83] There is more than an element of truth to this.

---

[82] Beaton Institute Archives, Cape Breton University, Jonathan G. MacKinnon fonds, MG 15.19, item 3.
[83] *Supra*, note 17, at p. 39.

However, we see in the pages of *Fear na Ceilidh* what could be called a progressive orientation on issues such as class, inequality and corporate power. The ambiguity is evident in a report he wrote in the September 1928 edition of *Fear na Céilidh* for example,[84] in which he reports that the population of Montreal had now passed one million. He commented that this would be a good story if one could be sure that the city was improving as well as growing. But, he said, things are not like that. In big cities, he argued, it was always the case that the common people were burdened by increases in rents and shortages of work, and that without a doubt, while there was a great deal of wealth in them, far too much of that wealth has been made by 'skinning'[85] poor people. In the November 1928 edition, he noted that in the year 1926, there were in the United States 231 people with incomes of over a million dollars, and that this number had increased in 1927 to 283. He noted that at the same time, there were almost a million and a half workers unemployed, half of whom were keeping alive on charity, and the other half with so little work that they were living on the edge of poverty. "Tha rudeigin cearr an rian an t-saoghail an uair a tha cuisean mar sin",[86] he wrote. In September 1929, he offered an interesting take on the Wall Street crash. He noted that a month or two before, a disaster had befallen Wall Street traders:

> Ach cha robh an call idir cho mor sa bha am fuaim; ma chaill cuid, bhuannaich cuid eile. Chan eil airgiod air a dheanamh no air a chosnadh anns an ait ud, ged is mor 'iomradh; chan eil an fheadhainn a bhios x'ga thathaich a' lughdachadh no a' meudachadh saibhreis na duthcha. Bu cho math dhaibh a bhi cluich a' chleas ris an cainte "iomlaid nam biodag".[87]

MacKinnon remained committed to using the journal as a means of showcasing and disseminating Gaelic literature; as in *Mac-Talla*, there were songs, stories, historical

[84] Vol. 1, No. 7, September 1928, p. 49.
[85] 'feannadh'.
[86] "There is something wrong with the way the world is organised when things are like this".
[87] "But their losses were not nearly as big as the noise they made; if some lost, others gained. Money is not made or spent in that place, although great are the 'reports'; those who frequent the place don't decrease or increase the wealth of the country. It would be just as well for them to be playing "exchange the daggers"."

accounts, including a somewhat idiosyncratic but interesting history of the Gaels which he was not able to complete before the journal folded, proverbs and a wide variety of other material. He sought to engender ethnic pride by repeatedly pointing out the disproportionately large role that Gaels and their descendants had played in the development of Canada. In the March 1928 edition, he noted that after Canadian confederation in 1867, the country had been led for 24 years by Gaels—Sir John A. Macdonald and Alexander MacKenzie, the first two Prime Ministers, adding that it was appropriate to demonstrate that Gaels were not at all lagging behind but rather surging ahead of the rest.[88] In the January 1930 issue, he noted that the first two female members of the Canadian Parliament, Senators Agnes MacPhail and Cairine Wilson, the daughter of Senator Robert MacKay, a Gaelic speaker originally from Caithness, were about to take up their seats. Although he was not sure that they actually were Gaelic speakers, they were not far removed from the language, he said, and went on to note that although the Gaels were never very numerous, they were always doing more than their fair share when it came to the business of the countries in which they lived. He concluded as follows:

> Ma tha leasan ann bu choir dhuinn ionnsachadh air ar teangannan, is e gu bheil sinn de shliochd dhaoine fiachail, gu'm bheil ar canain cho eireachdail x's cho priseil ria on chanain a thatar an diugh a' labhairt, agus gu'm bheil ar cleachdannan x's ar litreachas air an steidheachadh air deagh-bheus agus uaisle naduir ar sinnsir. Togadh na Gaidheil an ceann.[89]

Finally, *Fear na Ceilidh* was the means by which MacKinnon further developed his own literary interests. Those lay mainly in the area of translation of what he viewed as quality literature into Gaelic. His translation of Thomas Hardy's 'The Three Strangers' was serialised in the journal—John Lorne Campbell later published it in 1944, shortly after MacKinnon's

---

[88] 'Na Gaidheil agus an Duthaich' {'The Gaels and the Country'), Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1928, p. 5 at p. 6.

[89] Vol. 2, No. 6, January 1930: "If there is a lesson that we should learn by heart, it is that we are descendants of a worthy race, that our language is as beautiful and as precious as any that is spoken today, and that our manners and our literature are built upon the excellent character and noble disposition of our ancestors. Let the Gaels raise their heads."

death. He also included a short story which he composed himself, 'The Wheel Barrow', which was not particularly successful because of its rather heavy-handed didacticism.

In conclusion, although none of the four periodicals considered here matched *Mac-Talla* in terms of longevity and frequency of publication, each in some respects carried on the valuable work which *Mac-Talla* had carried out so effectively of providing to Gaels, especially those in eastern Nova Scotia, written material in their own language to inform and entertain them. That they did not match *Mac-Talla*'s output is no criticism—they faced virtually all of the same challenges which every Gaelic periodical in Scotland or elsewhere faced—and merely highlights Jonathan MacKinnon's staggering achievement. All such periodicals sought to preserve aspects of Gaelic culture such as song poetry, proverbial expressions, aspects of oral lore, and to disseminate knowledge of Gaelic history. The editor-publishers of these periodicals were fully aware of the exclusion of such knowledge from the Nova Scotia school system and were clearly conscious of the increasing pressure that language shift was placing on more traditional channels of cultural transmission, such as the 'taigh-cèilidh'.[90] They therefore turned to print as a means of filling the gap and stemming the incoming tidal wave of Anglophone culture.

All four periodicals were strongly ideologically committed to the preservation of the Gaelic language, culture and identity in the new world. Yet, all of these periodicals made at least some concessions to the rapidly changing linguistic and cultural context, not least

[90] 'Taighean-cèilidh' were the local houses in which members of Gaelic communities would traditionally gather, particular on long winter evenings, to exchange news, socialise and rehearse and participate in all aspects of their culture. There are many descriptions of the 'cèilidhean', 'visits', which would take place in the 'taigh-cèilidh, but Ronald Black provides an excellent summary: "In twentieth-century terms, the ceilidh was school and university, CD and video, council chamber and concert hall, cinema and newspaper, night-class and parliament, radio and television, internet and technical college", Ronald Black (ed.) (2001). *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, p. xii, and see pp. xii-xiv. For a first-hand description of the institution in Gaelic Nova Scotia in the second decade of the twentieth century—an account which echoes some of Black's points—see Joe Neil MacNeil, and John Shaw (transl. and ed.) (1987). *Sgeul gu Latha / Tales Until Dawn: The World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, at pp. 10-14.

through the inclusion of significant and in some cases increasing amounts of English content. Even MacKinnon's *Fear na Cèilidh*, which was resolutely all-Gaelic in terms of editorial content, contained some English-language advertising.[91] Yet, at the same time, although there were frequent exhortations in various forms to loyalty to the Gaelic language and culture, there was little in the way of analysis of the forces which were producing linguistic and cultural change, and virtually no criticism of the institutions or indeed the political actors which ultimately bore responsibility. All four periodicals were spearheaded by Gaels strongly committed to their native language and culture, but all were men of some significant educational accomplishments and who operated in a thoroughly anglo-dominant society, and it would unsurprising if such men had not internalised to some significant degree dominant Anglophone discourses.

[91] *An Solus Iùil* was the only one of the four periodicals which contained no advertising content; in the other two, advertising content was overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, in English.